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C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 001511

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S CARSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/13/2019

TAGS: PHUM KDEM KPAQ PTER SOCI SO ER

SUBJECT: SOMALIA - JOURNALIST ATTACK POSSIBLY LINKED TO
ISAIAS INTERVIEW

REF: NAIROBI 1133

Classified By: Somalia Unit Counselor Bob Patterson for reasons 1.4(b)
and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Ahmed Omar Hashi, the journalist wounded in the June 7 attack that resulted in the death of Shabelle Director Mukhtar Hirabe (reftel), has seconded media reports that he may have been the primary target of the attack, possibly as a result of his early May interview with Eritrean President Isaias, during which he asked Isaias about the commonly held view that the ongoing conflict in Somalia is in fact a proxy war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Hashi, who is currently recovering in Kampala, Uganda, told us in a July 9 telephone conversation that extremists continued to threaten him even while he was in a Mogadishu hospital after the June 7 shooting. End summary.

Targeted, Possible Retaliation
For Eritrea Interview

¶2. (C) Ahmed Omar Hashi, the Shabelle journalist who was wounded in the June 7 attack that resulted in the death of Shabelle Director Mukhtar Hirabe (reftel), told us that he received threats from extremists prior to the attack, apparently as a result of his early May interview with Eritrean President Isaias in Asmara. Hashi spoke to us from a hospital in Uganda, where he arrived after leaving Somalia with assistance from a Western journalist and, according to Hashi, with escort from the African Union Mission for Somalia (AMISOM) to the airport in Mogadishu. He told us that during the one-on-one interview with Isaias, he asked about the commonly-held view that the hostilities in Somalia have been largely a manifestation of the proxy war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Hashi told us that soon after returning to Mogadishu from Asmara, he began to receive calls from extremists asking him what had prompted him to ask Isaias questions that the extremists apparently felt were accusatory. In addition, the extremists accused Hashi of airing only pro-Transitional Federal Government (TFG) news items, while failing to adhere to al-Shabaab's demands to broadcast their songs glorifying war and jihad.

¶3. (C) Hashi added that the night prior to the June 7 attack, he had interviewed pro-TFG commanders who condemned

al-Shabaab activities in Somalia, followed the next morning by the broadcast of a telephone call from Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamma (ASWJ), who alleged that they had injured Hisbul-Islam leader Hassan Dahir Aweys. Hashi told us the extremists had decided to eliminate Shabelle,s two top personnel) Director Hirabe and journalist Hashi. Hirabe was killed in the attack.

¶4. (C) There has been no talk in Asmara of the attack on Hirabe and Hashi. Coverage of the interview indicated that Isaias,s comments were in line with the GSE,s normal stance on Somalia: anti-TFG statements and assigning blame for the Somalia situation on a Western conspiracy.

Comment

¶5. (C) Hirabe,s murder and the attempted assassination of Hashi are only the most extreme examples of al-Shabaab,s campaign against journalism critical of the group's efforts to overthrow the TFG. Somali reporters in Mogadishu tell us regularly of al-Shabaab,s threats and the difficult line they must toe in attempting to shed light on the actual state of affairs in Somalia. End comment.

¶6. (SBU) This message has been coordinated with Embassy Asmara.
SLUTZ